



St Nicholas CofE (C) First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124243
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 281670
Inspection dates 24 January 2006 to 25 January 2006
Reporting inspector Doris Bell AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First	School address	Belvide Gardens
School category	Voluntary controlled		Chillington Drive Codsall
Age range of pupils	3 to 9		Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV8 1AN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01902 434126
Number on roll	350	Fax number	01902 434133
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Don Walls
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Shirley Kingston

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large first school opened a 52-place nursery in September 2004. Children's attainment on entry is above that expected for their age and few pupils have learning difficulties. Four of the fifteen pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds have English as an additional language. The school has received many awards for its academic, sporting, arts and environmental achievements. Following its three-year period as a Beacon School, it is working on a 'Sustaining Success' project with other schools.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Nicholas' is an excellent school. It has very many outstanding features, including the quality of leadership and management. The drive, energy, teamwork and commitment of the staff, manifested in exceptionally good teaching, have kept standards significantly above average since the last inspection. The pupils' exemplary behaviour and their very positive attitudes to school underpin their excellent achievement across a wide range of exciting learning opportunities. In the words of one parent, the education provided by the school is 'challenging, stimulating and varied'. This is accurate. The school provides all pupils with high quality care and support and, through very well-focused target setting, it takes very good account of their individual learning needs.

Overall, the quality of provision is good in the Foundation Stage and standards are well above average by the end of Reception. However, the nursery area is small and this restricts the children's free access to the wide range of stimulating learning activities on offer. The staff successfully minimise the effect of this on children's learning.

Despite having no key issues at its last inspection, this highly self-critical school has moved forward impressively on several fronts. It recognises the hard work needed to sustain and improve already high standards and evaluates its work accurately and perceptively. It provides exceptionally good value for money and demonstrates a very strong capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

St Nicholas' is an excellent school. It has very many outstanding features, including the quality of leadership and management. The drive, energy, teamwork and commitment of the staff, manifested in exceptionally good teaching, have kept standards significantly above average since the last inspection. The pupils' exemplary behaviour and their very positive attitudes to school underpin their excellent achievement across a wide range of exciting learning opportunities. In the words of one parent, the education provided by the school is 'challenging, stimulating and varied'. This is accurate. The school provides all pupils with high quality care and support and, through very well-focused target setting, it takes very good account of their individual learning needs. Overall, the quality of provision is good in the Foundation Stage and standards are well above average by the end of Reception. However, the nursery area is small and this restricts the children's free access to the wide range of stimulating learning activities on offer. The staff successfully minimise the effect of this on children's learning. Despite having no key issues at its last inspection, this highly self-critical school has moved forward impressively on several fronts. It recognises the hard work needed to sustain and improve already high standards and evaluates its work accurately and perceptively. It provides exceptionally good value for money and demonstrates a very strong capacity to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils throughout the school achieve exceptionally well across a wide range of subjects, including sport and the arts, because of the very successful way in which their learning is planned and taught. Standards are well above average at the end of reception in all areas of learning. In Year 2, they are significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in Year 4 leave the school very well prepared for middle school, a significant minority having already reached the standards expected of pupils in Year 6. The school sets itself and the pupils challenging targets based on the accurate and rigorous assessment of learning. It tracks pupils' progress meticulously and it is always looking for ways to improve. For example, although it exceeded its targets in 2005, it is already successfully tackling the relative weaknesses identified in writing, including boys' writing. The Year 4 work on using comparative and superlative adjectives and adjectival phrases to improve writing was a good example of this. A separate and equally rigorous check is kept on the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and of those with English as an additional language. The very accurate match of work to the specific learning needs of all pupils ensures that these two groups make the same excellent progress as everyone else.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils really enjoy school because the provision made for their personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. Attendance is well above average and pupils say that they 'always feel safe and happy here'. From the youngest age, pupils work and play in a very caring, Christian environment. They quickly learn to respect, value and support each other very well. Their behaviour and attitudes are almost always exemplary and relationships are excellent throughout the school. They know that any unacceptable behaviour, however minor, is dealt with promptly and effectively. High quality displays successfully encourage pupils to express their thoughts, feelings and moods in different ways through discussions, music, art, the study of other cultures and features such as the 'Wow' week.

Older pupils take on additional responsibilities willingly and with a high degree of maturity. Through their work on the school and ECO Councils, they make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Their knowledge and understanding of how to stay fit and healthy, particularly through exercise and healthy eating, are outstanding. Their well above average skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and their rapidly growing economic awareness equip them very well for life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Outstanding teaching has successfully sustained high standards and achievement over time. Teaching focuses very strongly on what individual pupils need to learn to make the best progress of which they are capable. A key feature in this is the school's robust approach to target setting. Teachers accurately diagnose the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' learning, using the school's very thorough and rigorous assessment procedures. Pupils greatly appreciate the good quality of marking that almost always leaves them with a target to improve. Pupils with learning difficulties receive high quality support from well-briefed teaching assistants. The outstanding teamwork amongst the staff is underpinned by an almost tangible awareness of one another's thinking. It is closely and very effectively focused on ensuring the best possible progress for the pupils, even in the nursery, where the cramped accommodation prevents the children's free movement around the planned learning activities.

Pupils relish the many opportunities they have to think for themselves and make their own decisions. For example, a Year 2 mathematics lesson very successfully captured and stimulated their imagination, and the opportunity to share and evaluate their learning at the end of the lesson added to their excitement. Some pupils, desperate to show the different ways in which they had added three numbers together, could hardly contain their enthusiasm.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

All subjects and aspects of school life are very effectively promoted in an outstanding curriculum that caters very well for the needs of all pupils. There is a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and ICT. Provision in ICT has greatly improved since the last inspection. A particularly effective feature of the curriculum is the way subjects are linked together, ensuring that time is used efficiently and effectively to extend and reinforce pupils' learning. A very well attended and exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular clubs for activities, including chess and a large number of sports and arts, further enriches pupils' learning. These often involve a wide range of visits and visitors, both during and outside the normal school day, that very successfully extends pupils' learning and personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The outstanding care, support and guidance occur because all procedures, including those for child protection, are very thorough and comprehensive. All pupils are very well known as individuals and their personal and academic progress is very effectively monitored. They receive excellent guidance that helps them to improve all aspects of their learning, step by step. The school makes very good use of the relevant external

agencies to support pupils with learning difficulties by building their advice into the pupils' individual education plans. Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress and are very satisfied with the school. The school listens carefully to and values highly the views of pupils and parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The pupils' high standards and excellent achievement are the direct result of overall outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher has a very highly developed understanding of what the school does well and how it might improve further. This is encapsulated in detailed strategic planning that includes the much-needed improvements to the nursery. The school's accurate and perceptive evaluation of its work takes full account of the views of pupils, staff, parents and governors, all of whom are highly committed to sustaining its success. The school used its 'Beacon' status very effectively to share good practice with and to learn from other schools. This work continues in the 'Sustaining Success' project, which it is leading.

Teachers with responsibilities for aspects of the school's work, including the Foundation Stage curriculum, lead and manage their areas very well. They carry out robust checks on teaching and learning and have very high expectations of each other and of the pupils. These are very securely built on a thorough and rigorous evaluation of learning. The teamwork amongst the staff is highly effective. Governance is good. Governors strongly support the school. They keep a close check on its work and they work hard to sustain its success. Despite there being no key issues at the last inspection, the school's leadership and management have continued to move the school forward impressively on many fronts, including teaching, learning and the curriculum. This illustrates its outstanding capacity to improve even more.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us so very welcome in your school. It was a delight to talk to you and to find out how well you are doing. You told us how much you enjoyed school because of the way the staff care for you and because of all the exciting things they give you to do. There are lots of very good things about your school. Here are some of the ones we particularly liked.

You work very hard and make excellent progress because all of your teachers do their very best to help each one of you learn as well as you possibly can.

Your behaviour is usually excellent. You are kind, polite and very willing to help each other and your teachers in all sorts of ways.

You have a very good understanding of how to keep yourselves safe, and an excellent understanding of why it is important to keep fit and healthy and why it is important to support the environment.

The headteacher runs the school very well indeed. She listens carefully to what you and your parents think about how to make the school better, and she works very hard to make the changes happen, whenever possible.

Your parents and carers are right in thinking that you go to an excellent school and they work very hard to support it in every way possible.

We have asked your school to keep up its excellent work and to try to get the nursery extension done as soon as possible. This is because the nursery is too small and the children do not have enough room to choose the activities they want when they want to do them.

We hope that you will continue to make the excellent progress that you are making now and that you will enjoy learning more and more as you grow up.